



KEN PAXTON
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

May 7, 2015

Mr. Brendan W. Guy
Assistant Criminal District Attorney
County of Victoria
205 North Bridge Street, Suite 301
Victoria, Texas 77901

OR2015-08954

Dear Mr. Guy:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 568321.

The Victoria County Sheriff's Office (the "sheriff's office") received a request for information pertaining to a specified incident. You claim the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.108 and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We note the submitted information involves an alleged violation of section 32.51 of the Penal Code, which provides that "[a] person commits an offense if the person, with the intent to harm or defraud another, obtains, possesses, transfers, or uses an item of . . . identifying information of another person without the other person's consent[.]" Penal Code § 32.51(b)(1). For purposes of section 32.51, "identifying information" includes an individual's name, a financial institution account number, a social security number, or other government-issued identification number. *Id.* § 32.51(a)(1)(A), (C), (E), (a)(2). Article 2.29 of the Code of Criminal Procedure pertains to alleged violations of section 32.51 that occurred on or after September 1, 2005 and provides:

(a) A peace officer to whom an alleged violation of Section 32.51, Penal Code, is reported shall make a written report to the law enforcement agency that employs the peace officer that includes the following information:

(1) the name of the victim;

(2) the name of the suspect, if known;

(3) the type of identifying information obtained, possessed, transferred, or used in violation of Section 32.51, Penal Code; and

(4) the results of any investigation.

(b) On the victim's request, the law enforcement agency shall provide the report created under Subsection (a) to the victim. In providing the report, the law enforcement agency shall redact any otherwise confidential information that is included in the report, other than the information described by Subsection (a).

Crim. Proc. Code art. 2.29. For purposes of article 2.29, an offense is committed on or after September 1, 2005 if no "element of the offense occurs before that date." Act of Jun. 17, 2005, 79th Leg., R.S., ch. 294, § 1(b), 2005 Tex. Gen. Laws 885.

In this instance, the information at issue pertains to fraud, which constitutes an alleged violation of section 32.51. We note the alleged offense occurred after September 1, 2005. We further note the requestor may be the authorized representative of the victim of the alleged identity theft listed in the submitted report. Therefore, if the requestor is acting as the authorized representative of the victim, the responsive information is subject to article 2.29 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and must be released to the requestor, except to the extent that it contains confidential information. *See* Crim. Proc. Code art. 2.29. Although you claim the information at issue is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code, section 552.108 is a discretionary exception that does not make information confidential under the Act. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 586 (1991) (governmental body may waive section 552.108). Therefore, if the requestor is acting as the victim's authorized representative, the information at issue may not be withheld under section 552.108 of the Government Code. While you also claim some of the submitted information is subject to section 552.130 of the Government Code, the information you have marked consists of the victim's motor vehicle record information. Thus, if the requestor is acting as the victim's authorized representative, the requestor has a right of access to the victim's motor vehicle record information under section 552.023 of the Government Code. *See* Gov't Code § 552.023(a) (person or person's authorized representative has special right of access, beyond right of general public, to information held by governmental body that relates to person and is protected from public disclosure by laws intended to protect person's privacy interests); Open Records Decision No. 481 at 4 (1987) (privacy theories not implicated when individual requests information concerning self).

In the event the requestor is not acting as the victim's authorized representative, then the submitted information is not subject to article 2.29 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and we will address your claims against disclosure. Section 552.108 of the Government Code excepts from public disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if . . . release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). A governmental body that claims an exception to disclosure under section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why this exception is applicable to the information at issue. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977).

You state the submitted information relates to an open criminal case. Based on your representation and our review, we find the city has demonstrated that release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976).

As you acknowledge, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). Basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-88; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 127 at 3-4 (1976) (summarizing types of information deemed public by *Houston Chronicle*). We note basic information does not include motor vehicle record information encompassed by section 552.130 of the Government Code. *See* ORD 127 at 3-4. Thus, with the exception of the basic information, which you state has been released, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

In summary, if the requestor is acting as the authorized representative of the victim, the sheriff's office must release the submitted information pursuant to section 2.29 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. If the requestor is not acting as the victim's authorized representative, then, with the exception of basic information, which must be released, the sheriff's office may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at <http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/>

[orl_ruling_info.shtml](#), or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cindy Nettles', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/dls

Ref: ID# 568321

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)